

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

"WHAT do you think of our institutions?" is the question addressed to the European traveller in the United States by every chance acquaintance. The traveller finds the question natural, for if he be an observant man his own mind is full of these institutions. But he asks himself why it should be in America only that he is so interrogated. In England one does not inquire from foreigners, nor even from Americans, their views on the English laws and government; nor does the Englishman on the Continent find Frenchmen or Germans or Italians anxious to have his judgment on their politics. Presently the reason of the difference appears. The institutions of the United States are deemed by inhabitants and admitted by strangers to be a matter of more general interest than those of the not less famous nations of the Old World. They are, or are supposed to be, institutions of a new type. They form, or are supposed to form, a symmetrical whole, capable of being studied and judged all together more profitably than the less perfectly harmonized institutions of older countries. They represent an experiment in the rule of the multitude, tried on a scale unprecedentedly vast, and the results of which every one is concerned to watch. And yet they are something more than an experiment, for they are believed to disclose and display the type of institutions towards which, as by a law of fate, the rest of civilized mankind are forced to move, some with swifter, others with slower, but all with unresting feet.

When our traveller returns home he is again interrogated by the more intelligently curious of his friends. But what now strikes him is the inaptness of their questions. Thoughtful Europeans have begun to realize, whether with satisfaction or regret, the enormous and daily-increasing influence of the

United States, and the splendour of the part reserved for them in the development of civilization. But such men, unless they have themselves crossed the Atlantic, have seldom either exact or correct ideas regarding the phenomena of the New World. The social and political experiments of America constantly cited in Europe both as patterns and as warnings are hardly ever cited with due knowledge of the facts, much less with comprehension of what they teach; and where premises are misunderstood inferences must be unsound.

It is such a feeling as this, a sense of the immense curiosity of Europe regarding the social and political life of America, and of the incomparable significance of American experience, that has led and will lead so many travellers to record their impressions of the Land of the Future. Yet the very abundance of descriptions in existence seems to require the author of another to justify himself for adding it to the list.

I might plead that America changes so fast that every few years a new crop of books is needed to describe the new face which things have put on, the new problems that have appeared, the new ideas germinating among her people, the new and unexpected developments for evil as well as for good of which her established institutions have been found capable. I might observe that a new generation grows up every few years in Europe, which does not read the older books, because they are old, but may desire to read a new one. And if a further reason is asked for, let it be found in this, that during the last fifty years no author has proposed to himself the aim of portraying the whole political system of the country in its practice as well as its theory, of explaining not only the National Government but the State Governments, not only the Constitution but the party system, not only the party system but the ideas, temper, habits of the sovereign people. Much that is valuable has been written on particular parts or aspects of the subject, but no one seems to have tried to deal with it as a whole; not to add that some of the ablest writers have been either advocates, often professed advocates, or detractors of democracy.

To present such a general view of the United States both as a Government and as a Nation is the aim of the present book. But in seeking to be comprehensive it does not attempt to be exhaustive. The effort to cover the whole ground with equal

minuteness, which a penetrating critic — the late Karl Hillebrand — remarked upon as a characteristic fault of English writers, is to be avoided not merely because it wearies a reader, but because it leads the writer to descant as fully upon matters he knows imperfectly as upon those which his own tastes and knowledge qualify him to deal with. I shall endeavour to omit nothing which seems needed to make the political life and the national character and tendencies of the Americans intelligible to Europeans, and with this view shall touch upon some topics only distantly connected with government or politics. But there are also many topics, perhaps no more remote from the main subject, which I shall pass lightly over, either because they have been sufficiently handled by previous writers, or because I have no such minute acquaintance with them as would make my observations profitable. For instance, the common-school system of the United States has been so frequently and fully described in many easily accessible books that an account of it will not be expected from me. But American universities have been generally neglected by European observers, and may therefore properly claim some pages. The statistics of manufactures, agriculture, and commerce, the systems of railway finance and railway management, are full of interest, but they would need so much space to be properly set forth and commented on that it would be impossible to bring them within the present volumes, even had I the special skill and knowledge needed to distil from rows of figures the refined spirit of instruction. Moreover, although an account of these facts might be made to illustrate the features of American civilization, it is not necessary to a comprehension of American character. Observations on the state of literature and religion are necessary, and I have therefore endeavoured to convey some idea of the literary tastes and the religious habits of the people, and of the part which these play in forming and colouring the whole life of the country.

The book which it might seem natural for me to take as a model is the *Democracy in America* of Alexis de Tocqueville. It would indeed, apart from the danger of provoking a comparison with such an admirable master of style, have been an interesting and useful task to tread in his steps, and seek to do for the United States of 1888, with their sixty millions of

people, what he did for the fifteen millions of 1832. But what I have actually tried to accomplish is something different, for I have conceived the subject upon quite other lines. To Tocqueville America was primarily a democracy, the ideal democracy, fraught with lessons for Europe, and above all for his own France. What he has given us is not so much a description of the country and people as a treatise, full of fine observation and elevated thinking, upon democracy, a treatise whose conclusions are illustrated from America, but are founded, not so much on an analysis of American phenomena, as on general and somewhat speculative views of democracy which the circumstances of France had suggested. Democratic government seems to me, with all deference to his high authority, a cause not so potent in the moral and social sphere as he deemed it; and my object has been less to discuss its merits than to paint the institutions and people of America as they are, tracing what is peculiar in them not merely to the sovereignty of the masses, but also to the history and traditions of the race, to its fundamental ideas, to its material environment. I have striven to avoid the temptations of the deductive method, and to present simply the facts of the case, arranging and connecting them as best I can, but letting them speak for themselves rather than pressing upon the reader my own conclusions. The longer any one studies a vast subject, the more cautious in inference does he become. When I first visited America eighteen years ago, I brought home a swarm of bold generalizations. Half of them were thrown overboard after a second visit in 1881. Of the half that remained, some were dropped into the Atlantic when I returned across it after a third visit in 1883-84: and although the two later journeys gave birth to some new views, these views are fewer and more discreetly cautious than their departed sisters of 1870. I can honestly say that I shall be better pleased if readers of a philosophic turn find in this book matter on which they feel they can safely build theories for themselves, than if they take from it theories ready made.

To have dealt with the subject historically would have been profitable as well as pleasant, for the nature of institutions is best understood when their growth has been traced and illustrations adduced of their actual working. If I have made only a sparing use of this method, it has been from no want of love

for it, but because a historical treatment would have seldom been compatible with my chief aim, that of presenting, within reasonable compass, a full and clear view of the facts of to-day. American history, of which Europeans know scarcely anything, may be wanting in colour and romance when compared with the annals of the great states of the Old World; but it is eminently rich in political instruction. I hope that my American readers, who, if I am not mistaken, know the history of their country better than the English know that of England, will not suppose that I have ignored this instruction, but will allow for the omissions rendered necessary by the magnitude of the subject which I am trying to compress into two volumes. Similar reasons compel me to deal succinctly with the legal aspects of the Constitution; but the lay reader may possibly deem this brevity a merit.

Even when limited by the exclusion of history and law, the subject remains so vast and complex as to make needful some explanation of the conception I have formed of it, and of the plan upon which the book has been constructed.

There are three main things that one wishes to know about a national commonwealth, viz. its framework and constitutional machinery, the methods by which it is worked, the forces which move it and direct its course. It is natural to begin with the first of these. Accordingly, I begin with the government; and as the powers of government are two-fold, being vested partly in the National or Federal authorities and partly in the States, I begin with the National government, whose structure presents less difficulty to European minds, because it resembles the national government in each of their own countries. Part I. therefore contains an account of the several Federal authorities, the President, Congress, the Courts of Law. It describes the relations of the National or central power to the several States. It discusses the nature of the Constitution as a fundamental supreme law, and shows how this stable and rigid instrument has been in a few points expressly, in many others tacitly and half-unconsciously modified.

Part II. deals similarly with the State Governments, examining the constitutions that have established them, the authorities which administer them, the practical working of their legislative bodies. And as local government is a matter of

State regulation, there is also given some account of the systems of rural and city government which have been created in the various States, and which have, rural government for its merits and city government for its faults, become the theme of copious discussion among students of American institutions.

(Part III.) The whole machinery, both of national and of State governments, is worked by the political parties. Parties have been organized far more elaborately in the United States than anywhere else in the world, and have passed more completely under the control of a professional class. The party organizations in fact form a second body of political machinery, existing side by side with that of the legally constituted government, and scarcely less complicated. Politics, considered not as the science of government, but as the art of winning elections and securing office, has reached in the United States a development surpassing in elaborateness that of Britain or France as much as the methods of those countries surpass the methods of Servia or Roumania. Part III. contains a sketch of this party system, and of the men who "run" it, topics which deserve and would repay a fuller examination than they have yet received even in America, or than my limits permit me to bestow.

(Part IV.) The parties, however, are not the ultimate force in the conduct of affairs. Behind and above them stands the people. Public opinion, that is the mind and conscience of the whole nation, is the opinion of persons who are included in the parties, for the parties taken together are the nation; and the parties, each claiming to be its true exponent, seek to use it for their purposes. Yet it stands above the parties, being cooler and larger minded than they are; it awes party leaders and holds in check party organizations. No one openly ventures to resist it. It determines the direction and the character of national policy. It is the product of a greater number of minds than in any other country, and it is more indisputably sovereign. It is the central point of the whole American polity. To describe it, that is, to sketch the leading political ideas, habits, and tendencies of the American people, and show how they express themselves in action, is the most difficult and also the most vital part of my task; and to this task the twelve chapters of Part IV. are devoted.

(Part V.) As the descriptions given and propositions advanced in treating of the party system and of public opinion are necessarily general, they seem to need illustration by instances drawn from recent American history. I collect some such instances in Part V., and place there a discussion of several political questions which lie outside party politics, together with some chapters in which the attempt is made to estimate the strength and weakness of democratic government as it exists in the United States, and to compare the phenomena which it actually shows with those which European speculation has attributed to democracy in general.

(Part VI.) At this point the properly political sections of the book end. But there are certain non-political institutions, certain aspects of society, certain intellectual or spiritual forces, which count for so much in the total life of the country, in the total impression which it makes and the hopes for the future which it raises, that they cannot be left unnoticed. These, or rather such of them as are of most general interest, and have been least understood in Europe, will be found briefly treated in Part VI. In the view which I take of them, they are all germane, though not all equally germane, to the main subject of the book, which is the character, temper, and tendencies of the American nation as they are expressed, primarily in political and social institutions, secondarily in literature and manners.

This plan involves some repetition. But an author who finds himself obliged to choose between repetition and obscurity ought not to doubt as to his choice. Whenever it has been necessary to trace a phenomenon to its source, or to explain the connection between several phenomena, I have not hesitated, knowing that one must not expect a reader to carry in his mind all that has been told already, to re-state a material fact, or re-enforce a view which gives to the facts what I conceive to be their true significance.

It may be thought that a subject of this great compass ought, if undertaken at all, to be undertaken by a native American. No native American has, however, undertaken it. Such a writer would doubtless have many advantages over a stranger. Yet there are two advantages which a stranger, or at least a stranger who is also an Englishman, with some practical knowledge of English politics and English law, may hope to secure.

He is struck by certain things which a native does not think of explaining, because they are too obvious; and whose influence on politics or society, one to whom they seem part of the order of nature forgets to estimate. And the stranger finds it easier to maintain a position of detachment, detachment not only from party prejudice, but from those prepossessions in favour of persons, groups, constitutional dogmas, national pretensions, which a citizen can scarcely escape except by falling into that attitude of impartial cynicism which sours and perverts the historical mind as much as prejudice itself. He who regards a wide landscape from a distant height sees its details imperfectly, and must unfold his map in order to make out where each village lies, and how the roads run from point to point. But he catches the true perspective of things better than if he were standing among them. The great features of the landscape, the valleys, slopes, and mountains, appear in their relative proportion: he can estimate the height of the peaks and the breadth of the plains. So one who writes of a country not his own may turn his want of familiarity with details to good account if he fixes his mind strenuously on the main characteristics of the people and their institutions, while not forgetting to fill up gaps in his knowledge by frequent reference to native authorities. My own plan has been first to write down what struck me as the salient and dominant facts, and then to test, by consulting American friends and by a further study of American books, the views which I had reached.

To be non-partisan, as I trust to have been, in describing the politics of the United States, is not difficult for a European, especially if he has the good fortune to have intimate friends in both the great American parties. To feel and show no bias in those graver and more sharply accentuated issues which divide men in Europe, the issues between absolutism, oligarchy, and democracy; between strongly unified governments and the policy of decentralization, this is a harder task, yet a not less imperative duty. This much I can say, that no fact has been either stated or suppressed, and no opinion put forward, with the purpose of serving any English party-doctrine or party-policy, or in any way furnishing arguments for use in any English controversy. The admirers and the censors of popular government are equally likely to find in the present treatise materials

suited to their wishes; and in many cases, if I may judge from what has befallen some of my predecessors, they will draw from these materials conclusions never intended by the author.

Few things are more difficult than to use aright arguments founded on the political experience of other countries. As the chief practical use of history is to deliver us from plausible historical analogies, so a comprehension of the institutions of other nations enables us to expose sometimes the ill-grounded hopes, sometimes the empty fears, which loose reports about those nations generate. Direct inferences from the success or failure of a particular constitutional arrangement or political usage in another country are rarely sound, because the conditions differ in so many respects that there can be no certainty that what flourishes or languishes under other skies and in another soil will likewise flourish or languish in our own. Many an American institution would bear different fruit if transplanted to England, as there is hardly an English institution which has not undergone, like the plants and animals of the Old World, some change in America. The examination and appraisal of the institutions of the United States is no doubt full of instruction for Europe, full of encouragement, full of warning; but its chief value lies in what may be called the laws of political biology which it reveals, in the new illustrations and enforcements it supplies of general truths in social and political science, truths some of which were perceived long ago by Plato and Aristotle, but might have been forgotten had not America poured a stream of new light upon them. Now and then we may directly claim transatlantic experience as accrediting or discrediting some specific constitutional device or the policy of some enactment. But even in these cases he who desires to rely on the results shown in America must first satisfy himself that there is such a parity of conditions and surroundings in respect to the particular matter as justifies him in reasoning directly from ascertained results there to probable results in his own country.

It is possible that these pages, or at least those of them which describe the party system, may produce on European readers an impression which I neither intend nor desire. They may set before him a picture with fewer lights and deeper shadows than I have wished it to contain. Twenty years ago

I travelled in Iceland with two friends. We crossed the great Desert by a seldom trodden track, encountering, during two months of late autumn, rains, tempests, snow-storms, and other hardships too numerous to recount. But the scenery was so grand and solemn, the life so novel, the character of the people so attractive, the historic and poetic traditions so inspiring, that we returned full of delight with the marvellous isle. When we expressed this enchantment to our English friends, we were questioned about the conditions of travel, and forced to admit that we had been frozen and starved, that we had sought sleep in swamps or on rocks, that the Icelanders lived in huts scattered through a wilderness, with none of the luxuries and few even of the comforts of life. Our friends passed over the record of impressions to dwell on the record of physical experiences, and conceived a notion of the island totally different from that which we had meant to convey. We perceived too late how much easier it is to state tangible facts than to communicate impressions. If I may attempt to apply the analogy to the United States and their people, I will say that they make on the visitor an impression so strong, so deep, so fascinating, so inwoven with a hundred threads of imagination and emotion, that he cannot hope to reproduce it in words, and to pass it on undiluted to other minds. With the broad facts of politics it is otherwise. These a traveller can easily set forth, and is bound in honesty to set forth, knowing that in doing so he must state much that is sordid, much that will provoke unfavourable comment. The European reader grasps these tangible facts, and, judging them as though they existed under European conditions, draws from them conclusions disparaging to the country and the people. What he probably fails to do, because this is what the writer is most likely to fail in enabling him to do, is to realize the existence in the American people of a reserve of force and patriotism more than sufficient to sweep away all the evils which are now tolerated, and to make the politics of the country worthy of its material grandeur and of the private virtues of its inhabitants. America excites an admiration which must be felt upon the spot to be understood. The hopefulness of her people communicates itself to one who moves among them, and makes him perceive that the graver faults of politics may be far less dangerous there than they

would be in Europe. A hundred times in writing this book have I been disheartened by the facts I was stating: a hundred times has the recollection of the abounding strength and vitality of the nation chased away these tremors.

There are other risks to which such a book as this is necessarily exposed. There is the risk of supposing that to be generally true which the writer has himself seen or been told, and the risk of assuming that what is now generally true is likely to continue so. Against the former of these dangers he who is forewarned is forearmed: as to the latter I can but say that whenever I have sought to trace a phenomenon to its causes I have also sought to inquire whether these causes are likely to be permanent, a question which it is well to ask even when no answer can be given. I have attributed less to the influence of democracy than most of my predecessors have done, believing that explanations drawn from a form of government, being easy and obvious, ought to be cautiously employed. Some one has said that the end of philosophy is to diminish the number of causes, as the aim of chemistry is to reduce that of the elemental substances. But it is an end not to be hastily pursued. A close analysis of social and political phenomena often shows that causes are more complex than had at first appeared, and that that which had been deemed the main cause is active only because some inconspicuous, but not less important, condition is also present. The inquisition of the forces which move society is a high matter; and even where certainty is unattainable it is some service to science to have determined the facts and correctly stated the problems, as Aristotle remarked long ago that the first step in investigation is to ask the right questions.

I have, however, dwelt long enough upon the perils of the voyage: it is now time to put to sea. Let us begin with a survey of the national government, examining its nature and describing the authorities which compose it.